

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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Spring Cleaning: Getting the Chemicals Out

It is finally safe enough to talk about *spring* without offending any fellow Granite Staters. With the joy of warm weather also comes the dreaded task of spring cleaning. If you're like most people you've probably been rearranging shelves and looking for places to store things since last October. From lawn furniture to driveway de-icer; there's no more room. Now is the time to act.

The most hazardous items in your home right now are most likely the products you've brought home for the purposes of cleaning and maintaining your yard, home, and automobiles. This article will give you some basic guidance on how to handle, dispose of, or store those chemicals. Household hazardous chemicals can be flammable, toxic (poisonous), caustic (burn skin & eyes) and some can even react violently when they come into contact with other chemicals or water. If spring cleaning is a family activity in your home please give children the day off when it comes to handling household hazardous chemicals.

Sorting

Before you start handling chemicals be sure to ventilate the area by opening windows and be sure to wear gloves. Containers can leak, causing vapors to mix indoors and liquid chemicals to get on your skin. As you sort through your items you will want to place them into one of three categories: 1) Unidentifiable items, 2) Items to Get rid of, and 3) Items to Keep.

- 1 **Unidentifiable items:** Place unknown items with unreadable labels in a well ventilated indoor area. These items will go to a Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) collection event (explained below.)
- 2 **Items to Get Rid of:** The items you intend to get rid of should be divided into the four separate categories mentioned earlier; Flammable, Toxic, Caustic, and Reactive. Look for labeling information to determine the category for each chemical.
 - Flammable: Phrases like "Keep away from heat" or "Ignitable" indicate a flammable chemical.
 - Toxic: Toxic chemicals will have warnings such as "Keep away from children" and "If ingested call a physician."
 - Caustic: Caustic chemicals will have warning to "Avoid contact with skin and eyes."
 - Reactive: These will have clear warnings to "Keep away from water" or "Store away from other chemicals."

- 3 Items to Keep: Any remaining items you wish to keep should be stored separately in the four categories previously mentioned. Always store hazardous chemicals in the safest place possible such as outdoor sheds or in a garage. Keep flammable items away from your home's furnace and keep reactive items out of cabinets with plumbing inside. Pesticides should be kept inside large plastic storage bins to prevent contact with pets and wildlife.

A word about paint

Household paint usually comes in three categories; spray paint, latex paint, and oil-based paint (oil-based paint also includes stains and varnishes). Spray paint & oil-based paint are both flammable and therefore considered household hazardous waste. Latex paint, however, is considered regular solid waste once it has been completely dried. If you have a large amount of latex paint that you cannot donate, you can dry it out with kitty litter or a commercial hardener. Once the latex paint is in a solid form it can be placed into the trash. Remember to leave the lids off so that your local solid waste facility can see what's inside.

Disposal

I usually recommend that people try to find a way to use up their hazardous products if possible. Some suggestions are: ask a neighbor if they can use it, offer it to a local school with a wood shop program, Boys & Girls Clubs, Boy Scout Troops, theater or set design groups, art studios, or small contractors. But if your items are no longer usable your best bet is to bring them to a Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) collection event.

Both your unidentifiable items as well as unwanted labeled items can both go to an HHW collection event. A list of some upcoming HHW events can be found on the State's HHW Page at: <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/p2au/pps/hhwp/index.htm>

If your town does not appear on the list contact them and ask if they plan on holding an event in the near future. If your town does not hold collection event it would be best to bring all of your items to another town's HHW collection event. Most towns charge a small fee for out-of-town wastes. Not all towns accept out-of-town waste so please be sure to use the contact links provided on the above mentioned list and discuss options with the town or city you would like to bring your waste to. Collection events begin as early as May in some areas. Collections are not usually held during the New Hampshire winters due to possible freezing and bursting of containers.

If these options don't work for your situation, you will need to contact a private hazardous waste transporter that is certified to transport within the State of New Hampshire. But keep in mind that this will be the most expensive option and it would be much cheaper to bring your items to them as opposed to having them come to you.

Maintaining the Clean

To keep your house free of excess hazardous chemicals consider purchasing smaller quantities in the future. While buying in-bulk seems cheaper in the long run, it doesn't make much sense if you have to dispose of large quantities of the product every year. Another option is to try non-hazardous alternatives to hazardous products. For more information about alternatives to

hazardous products please look at the State of New Hampshire's Pollution Prevention Page at:
<http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/p2au/pps/pphp/index.htm>

For more information about hazardous materials in your home download the a Household Audit worksheet here:

<http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/p2au/pps/hhwp/documents/home.pdf>

For more information contact the NHDES Household Hazardous Waste Program at (603) 271-2047

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